

Joint Victorian State Election Submission



Community Child Care Association, Early Learning Association Australia and Early Childhood Australia (Victorian Branch) acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we live and work and pay our respects to elders past and present, and to the emerging leaders of tomorrow.

We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been nurturing and teaching children on this land for thousands of years.



Contents

About Us	4
How far we've come since 2018	5
Pillar 1: Access	6
Pillar 2: Quality	7
Pillar 3: Workforce	9
Pillar 4: Sector Sustainability	10

About Us



Established in 1971, we are the voice of community-based early childhood education and outside school hours care (OSHC) services in Victoria. We helped set up the very first community-owned services in Australia. Today, we continue to support and champion both community-owned services and the wider sector. We're active across the state, providing leadership and advocacy, working with governments, and supporting services with membership, quality professional development and consultancies.

We support long day care, OSHC, kindergarten, family day care and occasional care educators, teachers, leaders, coordinators and directors. Community Child Care Association is the Victorian peak for community-owned education and care. We are also the state peak for OSHC.

www.cccinc.org.au



Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA) is a peak membership association. Our vision is excellence and equity in early childhood education and care. Our diverse membership base includes 630 service providers managing services at over 1,250 locations with more than 15,000 staff caring and educating 70,000 children.

Our members are early years management organisations, independent kindergartens, local governments, long day care services, government and independent schools and out of school hours care programs.

www.elaa.org.au



Early Childhood Australia (ECA) has been a voice for young children since 1938. We are the peak early childhood advocacy organisation, acting in the interests of young children, their families and those in the early childhood field. ECA advocates to ensure quality, social justice and equity in all issues relating to the education and care of children aged birth to eight years.

www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

How far we've come...the journey since the 2018 state election

Our children need us to get it right when it comes to education and care in Victoria – and to do it right now.

In the lead up to the 2018 state election, we urged the government to ensure that education and care is a top priority, and we stand by it still. Our youngest citizens need a strong, committed, and resilient education and care sector to support them to thrive, and together we can put these words into action.

Throughout the pandemic the education and care sector has educated children and supported families, adapting to different conditions and continuous change. Our workforce has provided essential support to children, families and communities during these challenging times.

Since 2018, we're celebrating:

- The implementation of the Early Childhood Reform Plan including the ground-breaking introduction of funded three-year-old kindergarten
- New outside of school hours care services establishment grants
- A raft of workforce incentives to secure and build the educators and teachers our sector needs

- Ongoing support including cleaning and ventilation grants to help services to operate during COVID-19
- Recent announcements on free kindergarten, a scale up to 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten 'pre-prep' and new government-operated centres in areas of need.

But there is more to be done. The incoming Victorian state government has a unique opportunity to improve outcomes across the whole education and care sector, by co-investing in systemic change with the federal government. This submission focuses on the unique opportunities made possible by both state investment, and by leveraging investment at a state and federal level.

Now, in 2022, we are urging the Victorian government to support...

Access and inclusion for all Victorian children, wherever they live

Quality service provision across the state to provide the best outcomes for communities

Workforce support to ensure an empowered and valued education and care sector

Sector sustainability and investment in the future of not-for-profit education and care in Victoria



Julie Price
Executive Director
Community Child Care Association

Julie Price



David Worland
Chief Executive Officer
Early Learning Association Australia

David Worland



Marie Howard
President (Victorian branch)
Early Childhood Australia

Marie Howard

Pillar 1: Access

SOLUTION 1:

Short Term: Greater investment in and coordination of current inclusion programs, and increased accountability of deliverables and outcomes.

Long term: State and federal government co-designed Inclusion Support Program to strengthen Victoria's commitment to the inclusion of all children.

All Victorian children need support to succeed and to give them the best start in life, and some children require more support than others. The rate of children experiencing risk of vulnerability has increased. In Victoria in 2021, one in five (21.2%) children were considered developmentally vulnerable in one or more Australian Early Development Census (AECDC) domains (10.5% were vulnerable in two or more domains). This has increased from 2015 when 19.9% were considered developmentally vulnerable (AECDC 2022). Teachers and educators require professional specialist support in tailoring their pedagogy and practice to provide inclusive environments for children in their care. This is particularly pertinent for the many new teachers and educators entering the sector learning about inclusive practice for the first time. Children with disabilities, developmental delays, serious health conditions, trauma and other challenges are less likely to participate in high-quality education and care, yet these children have the most to gain from these services (Melhuish *et al*, 2015). Inclusion Support Programs at both state and federal levels aim to ensure that children who face barriers to access or participation in education and care can receive the unique support they need.

There is significant unmet demand for these programs, particularly in regional and remote areas. This means we are missing out on opportunities to give children the best start in life. Improving vulnerable children's access and participation in education and care is essential, and additional support is needed given the scale-up in kindergarten.

To address these issues, the Victorian Government, in partnership with the Australian Government and the sector, should invest in system coordination to integrate inclusion supports available to children, families and services, so that accessing support is seamless, and promotes the inclusion of all children, whatever their needs. With an increase in service numbers in Victoria, investment must be made to increase available resources.

Actions:

- Closely align the federal and state Inclusion Support Programs
- Co-design policy to ensure a more streamlined administrative and funding process
- Increase funding and resources that support inclusion, and that match the increased demand for inclusion support.

Benefits:

- Our most vulnerable children get the strongest possible start in life
- Parents and families are supported through opportunities to re-join or enter the workforce
- Vital support is more accessible for families and services
- Building the capacity of the sector's workforce ensures access can be provided to all children.



Pillar 2: Quality

SOLUTION 2:

Mandate National Quality Standard Assessment and Rating at least every three years.

The National Quality Standard sets the benchmark for early childhood education and care and outside school hours care services.

Families must be able to rely on quality ratings as an accurate guide for the quality of education and care services. However, ratings are only relevant if they are up to date.

While assessment and rating visits have been delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, services in Victoria are waiting on average over three years between visits with many services unrated for more than four years.

All services across the sector should be assessed every three years at a minimum, and services rated as Working Towards or below should be prioritised for assessment. Services should not be permitted to continue to fall below Meeting Standards and to make no progress between assessments. Approved Providers who wish to expand should be Meeting or Exceeding standards in all their current services.

Actions:

- Increase funding commitment to ensure National Quality Standard assessment and ratings at least every three years to encourage high-quality service provision beginning with Working Towards services
- Advocate to the federal government to increase funding that supports quality improvement.

Benefits:

- Children's development will be well supported
- Children will be better equipped when beginning school
- Families have confidence their child is accessing high-quality services that are regularly assessed
- Quality service delivery is strengthened over time, creating better outcomes for children and families.



SOLUTION 3:

Support services in vulnerable communities to apply for Excellent and Exceeding ratings.

In disadvantaged areas of Victoria, education and care services are more likely to be assessed as Working Towards National Quality Standards, rather than services in more advantaged areas.

Families and communities have much to gain from high-quality education and care, particularly in vulnerable and regional communities. Areas of relative disadvantage are more likely to have education and care services with an NQS rating of Working Towards National Quality Standards compared with other areas. With government support, we can raise the bar for quality service provision by providing tailored coaching for services to achieve Excellent and Exceeding ratings.

Action:

- Provide coaching, resources and support for services to understand and operationalise the Exceeding rating themes.

Benefit:

- Creates an incentive and reward for continuous improvement.



Pillar 3: Workforce

SOLUTION 4:

Work with the Federal Government to co-invest in a retention bonus payment for all Victorian educators across the sector.

A skilled workforce and attractive career opportunities are crucial in our sector, given the essential role of educators in supporting Victoria's children, their families, and communities. COVID-19 has had a significant impact on our sector and the pandemic has exacerbated our already critical workforce retention problem.

Victoria leads the way in workforce incentives for kindergarten educators and teachers, as well as providing significant wage supplements to kindergarten teachers under select industrial agreements. However, more is needed to support all families to work and all children to thrive.

To support our workforce to provide high-quality education and care for children – from birth to school-age – our workforce must see an increase in salaries, and better working conditions. However, the improvement of wages and conditions must be secured without increasing the cost of education and care for families.

Actions:

- Provision of a one-off retention 'bonus' payment of \$3,000 for Victorian educators (similar to that provided to the healthcare sector) funded by the state and federal governments
- Commitment from the Victorian Government to support the National Workforce Strategy's recommendations on wages and improved conditions during the two years that follow the payment's rollout.

Benefits:

- Increased workforce retention due to greater recognition for the valuable work of educators
- Educators will enjoy the new benefits that come with the National Workforce Strategy implementation and continue their careers in the sector
- Children will benefit from building relationships with stable educators in their service.

Pillar 4: Sector Sustainability

SOLUTION 5:

Provide support to ensure a sustainable not-for-profit sector.

Local governments, universities, and churches are increasingly charging commercial rents for education and care services – this is not financially viable for community-owned services to continue to operate, leaving them vulnerable to closure.

Not-for-profit and community-owned and managed education and care services provide higher quality outcomes for children and better conditions for educators. When there are no owners, directors or shareholders waiting on a financial return on their investment, services can spend more time and money focusing on children's development and wellbeing. These funds are essential for supporting services, and many rely on paying low rent to ensure their sustainability.

Community and not-for-profit services find it difficult to plan for their community's needs, relying on grants, council support and community fundraising to invest in infrastructure.

Governance and committees are largely run by volunteer parents and carers, along with service directors and educators. Governance support, for example, training and intensive support, is provided for kindergartens. Further support from both federal and state governments is needed across the sector to ensure good governance and infrastructure are delivered so that voluntary committees' roles are proportionate and reflective of contemporary demands on families' time. Funding to contribute to the cost of an administrative officer would alleviate pressure and ease the administrative burden on voluntary committees.

Actions:

- Support in the form of contribution to paid administrative staff will ease the additional administrative burden on directors, and ensure they have the support they need to deliver high-quality kindergarten programs
- The Victorian government continues to work with local governments to support community-owned services by offering 'peppercorn' rents
- State government works with federal and local governments, to ensure appropriate planning and funding mechanisms that prioritise the support of community-managed services.

Benefits:

- Community committees and education and care leaders receive the support they need to oversee and deliver high-quality services
- Affordable fees for families
- Families have accessible, high-quality services that are guided by local community needs.

SOLUTION 6:

New government-owned and community-managed services are created in consultation with communities to cater to their unique needs.

To meet the growing demand for education and care across the state, more new services will need to be established, especially in areas identified as 'child care deserts'. Not-for-profit and community-owned and managed services offer high-quality service provision and are more likely to achieve Excellent and Exceeding ratings (TICCSS, 2021). These are also the services most often prevalent in vulnerable and disadvantaged communities.

High-quality education and care provides significant benefits for children's learning, development and wellbeing, as well as supporting families, particularly women, to engage in employment and training.

Community-managed services tend to meet the needs of the community better. There will be significant benefits for families, children, and communities by ensuring a high number of community-owned and managed services going forward.

Action:

- State government works with local communities, LGAs and existing providers to ensure services are providing what's needed for each community.

Benefits:

- Services that can provide essential support for communities, with their needs front of mind
- Place-based service development improves outcomes for children, families and communities.

References

Melhuish E, Ereky-Stevens K, Petrogiannis K, Vaharis Penderi E, Rentzou K, Tawell A, Broekhuizen M and Leseman P 2015, *A review of research on the effects of early childhood education and care (ECEC) upon child development*. CARE project: Curriculum Quality Analysis and Impact Review of European Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).

Warrilow P, Graham N, Robertson C 2021, *Not for Profit Education and Care: High quality, accessible and resilient – Findings of the 2020/2021 Trends in Community Children's Services Survey*, Australian Community Children's Services. Available from <https://ausccs.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/TICCSS-Report-2020-Wave-6-v12012022.pdf> [30 August 2022].